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(54) **Method and apparatus for investigating drill string stand-off and drilling fluid sound speed while drilling**

Verfahren und Vorrichtung zur Messung des Abstandes zwischen Bohrstrang und Bohrlochwand sowie der Schallgeschwindigkeit in der Bohrspülung während des Bohrens

Méthode et dispositif pour mesurer la distance entre le train de tiges de forage et la paroi du puits ainsi que la vitesse du son dans la boue de forage pendant le forage

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Description

[0001] The present invention relates to a method and apparatus for measuring the sound speed of drilling fluid for use in accurately calculating the stand-off distance between a drillstring and the borehole wall while drilling subterranean oil and gas wells.

[0002] Apparatus for measuring the inner diameter of a borehole is well known in the art, where a borehole is a well bore drilled into the earth. Until recently, sonde-type devices were commonly used to make such measurements, where a sonde is a wireline device lowered into the borehole after drilling operations have ceased. Borehole measurements using sonde devices is very time consuming and costly, especially considering the fact that drilling operations must cease and the drillstring must be removed. Early sonde devices used mechanical calipers extending from the sonde to contact the borehole wall to measure the borehole diameter. There are several disadvantages associated with the use of mechanical devices, including significant maintenance, frequent failures and breakdowns and a high incidence of inaccurate measurements. Mechanical devices may also cause damage to steel casing of the well.

[0003] More recently, ultrasonic acoustic devices have been developed for measuring various parameters, including borehole diameter and stand-off distances in a borehole. At first, the acoustic devices were mounted on a sonde and lowered into the borehole, so that drilling operations still had to be interrupted while the measurements were being made. Also, the sonde had to be mounted with several acoustic devices around the circumference of the sonde for making the appropriate measurements, since the sonde typically did not rotate. Furthermore, the sonde devices with multiple acoustic devices could be very complex and costly.

[0004] Subsequently, measurement-while-drilling (MWD) techniques have been developed to overcome the disadvantages of sonde devices. MWD measuring tools typically take advantage of acoustic devices and transducers, where these devices are mounted on or within one or more MWD drill collars provided on the drillstring. The drillstring includes a series of drill pipes serially linked to a series of drill collars. The drill collars are connected to a drill bit used to drill the borehole. The primary function of the drill collars is to provide a downward thrust or weight on the drill bit. Since the stand-off measurements were made while the drillstring is in the borehole, the measurements were typically made of the stand-off distance between the drillstring and the borehole wall. The measurements may be stored and later retrieved, sent immediately to the surface using other communication techniques, or concurrently used in data analysis apparatus.

[0005] An acoustic device transmits an acoustic pulse towards a surface, such as the borehole wall, where the acoustic pulse reflects off the surface and is

detected by an acoustic receiver. Often, the acoustic device is an acoustic transducer or transceiver capable of transmitting, detecting and receiving acoustic pulses.

The elapsed time between the transmission and reception of the pulse, referred to as the round-trip transit time (RTT), is used to calculate or derive the distance of travel. The relative position of the surface is half this distance.

[0006] While the use of acoustic devices have facilitated MWD, the primary problem is the determination of the sound speed of the drilling fluid present in the borehole. The drillstring is immersed in the drilling fluid, where the drilling fluid is preferably a special mixture of clay, water and chemical additives pumped downhole through a center bore of the drillstring during drilling operations, out of the drill bit and upwardly through the annulus to return to surface drilling equipment. The drilling fluid cools the rapidly rotating bit, lubricates the drillstring if it is rotating in the well bore, carries rock cuttings to the surface and serves as a plaster to prevent the borehole wall of the borehole from crumbling or collapsing. The drilling fluid also provides the weight or hydrostatic head to prevent extraneous fluids from entering the borehole and control downhole pressures that may be encountered.

[0007] In general, the sound speed of the drilling fluid is not known and depends upon the type of drilling fluid being used, the percent of solids existing in the fluid, the salinity and density of the fluid, and the borehole temperature and pressure. Some techniques estimate the sound speed based on theoretical considerations, or otherwise use a measurement of the sound speed taken before or after the drilling operations. However, sound speed values of known drilling fluids vary from less than 1,100 meters per second (m/s) to greater than 1,800 m/s. Also, conditions in the borehole change during drilling operations, which directly modify the drilling fluid and its sound speed characteristics. Therefore, an accurate determination of the sound speed of the drilling fluid is considered necessary for an accurate acoustic stand-off measurement when using acoustic measuring devices.

[0008] Of course, the most direct method known for measuring the sound speed is to measure the RTT of a pulse which travelled through a known distance. Establishing the known distance then becomes the primary goal to solving the sound speed measurement. So far, the only reliable way of establishing a known distance for MWD type measuring apparatus has traditionally been to use multiple acoustic devices. One such example is disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 4,665,511 to Rodney, et al. The apparatus disclosed in Rodney includes at least one acoustic transceiver disposed within a section of the drillstring. A second acoustic receiver is disposed longitudinally along the drillstring at a selected distance away from the transceiver, where the receiver detects a portion of each acoustic pulse generated by the transceiver. The difference in travel time between the pulse

sensed by the second receiver and the pulse sensed by the transceiver is intended to be determinative of the acoustic velocity of the drilling fluid through which the pulses have propagated. This is based on the assumption that the difference in distances of the travel paths of the respective pulses is known.

[0009] The primary problem with a device according to Rodney is that the path through which each acoustic pulse travels is not well-defined. Due to the rather coarse or jagged surface of the borehole wall, the highly directional nature of acoustic devices and the high incidence of refracted acoustic pulses, measurement is difficult if not indeterminate. In these conditions, there are several paths that each pulse may travel, so that the receiver may detect multiple reflections. Thus, it is not readily known which reflection represents the desired, predetermined path. Furthermore, even if accurate measurements are acquired, the use of multiple devices significantly increases the cost of the overall system. The cost includes one or more additional acoustic devices as well as the cost of the mounting apparatus for each device. Also, a drill collar appropriately fashioned for mounting multiple devices in appropriate locations is required, and each device must be connected to control circuitry.

[0010] Other techniques have been tried using a single transceiver. None of these techniques to date have been successful since they either ignore the sound speed of the drilling fluid or estimate the sound speed based upon theoretical values or measured values taken before or after drilling operations. Obviously, these devices have limited accuracy.

[0011] Thus, it is desirable to measure the stand-off distance and sound speed of drilling fluid as accurately as possible and during drilling operations, using the simplest and most cost-effective system as possible. It is preferable if only a single transceiver or transducer is used while still obtaining accurate measurements.

[0012] An MWD apparatus and technique is disclosed for measuring the stand-off distance and the sound speed of the drilling fluid in a borehole using a single ultrasonic transducer. The ultrasonic transducer is positioned on an MWD drill collar near a tubular ring or member, where the radius of the tubular member is greater than the radius of the drillstring and the MWD collar. The tubular member may typically be a cylindrically shaped upset formed from upset tubing, or, alternatively, the tubular member may be a stabilizer blade. The radial difference between the MWD collar and the tubular member is predetermined. The minimum possible stand-off distance occurs when the drillstring is side-walled against the borehole wall and the transducer is directly facing the borehole wall. In this position, the tubular member displaces the acoustic device from the borehole wall approximately equal to the radial difference between the tubular member and the MWD collar. Thus, since the radial difference is known and predetermined, the stand-off distance is calculated by measur-

ing the RTT value of the ultrasonic pulse at the minimum position, and then dividing twice the radial difference by the minimum RTT value.

[0013] Acoustic measurements may be continually made if the drillstring is rotating within the borehole, or can be made periodically if the drillstring is sliding. The measurement need only be made once if the position and orientation of the drillstring and transducer can be verified. The key is knowing when the transducer is in the minimum stand-off position and whether the drillstring assumes this position while drilling. Field tests have verified that rotary drilling equipment spends a significant amount of time against the borehole wall during drilling operations. Further, the field tests verified that a minimum stand-off is sampled during most of the intervals actually observed.

[0014] If the drillstring is rotating, The acoustic measurements are received in the form of a plurality of RTT values, which may be plotted versus elapsed time on a graph. The plotted curve may take many forms depending upon the shape of the borehole wall circumference and the location of the drillstring. Typically, the plot appears very similar to a sinusoidal wave when the drilling equipment is side-walled and the drillstring is rotating since the borehole is generally cylindrical or oval shaped. RTT or stand-off snap-shots may be retrieved, where each snap-shot comprises an array of RTT values and corresponding real-time values for a relatively short period of time, such as a few seconds. Each snap-shot pattern may be analyzed using standard time and frequency domain techniques to determine the frequency of the minimum, the frequency content, and the departure from minimum. This information is used to assign a quality factor to the data as it is taken, and only the data of the highest quality is used to determine the sound speed of the drilling fluid. Recent minimums are compared to those determined in the recent past to ascertain the quality of the data.

[0015] Once a repeatable and periodic minimum value is obtained, the sound speed may be readily calculated and then compared to past values or theoretical values. If the values compare within a statistically acceptable deviation, then the minimum value is considered reliable. Each of the RTT values are then multiplied by the sound speed to derive the stand-off distances, which values may also be plotted versus elapsed time. The calculations described are preferably performed using a computer with appropriate memory, timers and data analysis software routines. The entire procedure may be performed in software.

[0016] In conventional rotary drilling, the entire drillstring is rotated to rotate the drill bit when drilling the borehole. However, the technique of the present invention may be applied to another type of rotary drilling, referred to as turbodrilling. In turbodrilling, a fluid-drive turbine, commonly called a mud motor, is placed in the drillstring just above the drill bit. The pressure from the pumps at the surface pumping drilling fluid or mud down

through the drill stem turns the turbine which rotates the drill bit. The drillstring does not rotate as in conventional rotary drilling, but instead slides within the borehole as the drill bit penetrates further into the formation.

[0017] Turbodrilling is more common when drilling slanted or horizontal boreholes. In slanted or horizontal boreholes, the minimum stand-off measurement is taken when the tubular member is resting on the "bottom" of the borehole and the transducer is facing the borehole wall. The drillstring is manipulated until it is established that the acoustic device is at the minimum stand-off distance. The orientation of the drillstring may be verified through surveys with magnetometers and accelerometers. Once the position is verified and a measurement is taken, the minimum RTT value measurement is directly used to calculate sound speed.

[0018] An alternative data analysis technique is to derive stand-off histograms from the RTT values. Each RTT value corresponds to a "count" in one column or bin of a histogram, where each bin represents a sub-range of time within a total range of expected RTT time values. As each RTT value is measured, it is compared to the bin ranges and assigned to an appropriate bin. The bin is simply incremented when an RTT value corresponding to that bin is received. The bins representing the shortest RTT time values are analyzed to determine the minimum RTT value, and the sound speed is readily calculated. This alternative procedure may also be performed primarily by software, and would require less memory.

[0019] A better understanding of the present invention can be obtained from the following detailed description of a preferred embodiment, given by way of example only, with reference to the following drawings, in which:

Figure 1 shows a cross-sectional elevation view of a drillstring in a borehole, where the drillstring includes a sound speed measuring device according to the present invention;

Figure 2 shows one embodiment of a computer and control apparatus which may be used with a sound speed measuring device of the present invention;

Figure 3a is graph of measured round-trip transit times plotted versus elapsed time for a given period;

Figure 3b is a graph of stand-off distance plotted versus elapsed time derived from the graph of Figure 3a; and

Figure 4 is a flow chart diagram illustrating the operation of software in a computer system used to control and calculate sound speed and stand-off measurements.

[0020] Referring now to Figure 1, a cross-sectional elevation view is shown illustrating a drillstring 20 used to drill a borehole in the earth 22. The borehole includes a borehole wall 24, where the stand-off distance,

referred to by the letters SD, is the distance between the drillstring 20 and the borehole wall 24. The drillstring 20 typically includes a series of drill pipes connected to a series of drill collars, where a measurement while drilling (MWD) collar 26 is shown. The MWD drill collar 26 is further connected to a drill bit (not shown) provided at the end of the drillstring 20. A drill collar such as 26 is a tubular or cylindrical pipe joint having threader box (female) and pin (male) ends for attaching to other drill collars in the drillstring 20. It is common for the drill collars to be located near the drill bit. The drillstring 20 includes a central bore or conduit (not shown) used to pump drilling mud or drilling fluid 28 into the borehole. The drilling fluid 28 exits the drill bit and fills the annulus or borehole between the drillstring 20 and the borehole wall 24 as the fluid is pumped upwardly to the surface in a known manner. Thus, the drillstring 20 is essentially immersed in the drilling fluid 28.

[0021] The drillstring 20 preferably includes a tubular member 30, where the tubular member 30 is preferably cylindrical and has a radius R2 relative to a central axis 32 of the drillstring 20. The radius of the MWD drill collar 26 relative to the central axis 32 is R1, where R2 is greater than R1. The tubular member 30 is typically a stabilizer blade used to help hold the drill bit on course. Alternatively, the tubular member 30 could be in the form of upset tubing, where upset tubing is made thicker in the area of the threads between the drill pipe and the MWD drill collar 26 in order to compensate for the metal cut away in making the threads. Typically, the additional metal is put on the inside, but is preferably put on the outside of the drillstring 20, where it is then referred to as exterior-upset tubing. The term "tubular member" is generically used for any tubular or cylindrical structure, such as an upset or blade, which has a greater radius than the MWD drill collar 26 so as to displace the MWD drill collar 26 from the borehole wall 24.

[0022] An acoustic transducer 34 is mounted on the MWD drill collar 26 using one of many mounting methods known to those skilled in the art. The transducer 34 is preferably a piezoelectric acoustic transducer including a piezoelectric crystal fashioned to convert acoustic signals to electrical signals and vice versa, although other types of transducers are contemplated. The transducer 34 generates a series of acoustic pulses, where each pulse propagates through the drilling fluid 28, reflects off the borehole wall 24 as an echo pulse, which propagates back towards the transducer 34. The piezoelectric crystal detects the echo pulse, where the transducer 34 preferably includes a receiver and amplifier, so that the transducer 34 serves as an acoustic transceiver.

[0023] It will be appreciated that the duration of each of the acoustic pulses are sufficiently shorter than the time required for the pulses to propagate from the transducer 34 to the borehole wall 34 and back again. The magnitude of the pulses must also be sufficient to assure detection of the reflected echo pulse by the

transducer 34. In addition, it is important that the rotation of the drillstring 20 has not rotated the transducer 34 beyond the point at which the reflected echo is no longer detectable. This requires that the round-trip transit time (RTT) of the pulse is sufficiently less than the time required to move the transducer 34 by more than its diameter. Since the drillstring 20 typically rotates at approximately 40 revolutions per minute (rpm) and the sound speed of the drilling fluid 28 is about 1100 to 1800 meters per second, the drillstring 20 typically does not rotate appreciably before the echo pulse is received by the transducer 34.

[0024] A computer and control apparatus 36 is preferably mounted within the MWD drill collar 26 and connected to the transducer 34. The computer and control apparatus 36 includes the appropriate circuitry for activating the transducer 34 to send each acoustic pulse and to detect the echo pulse as reflected off the borehole wall 24. Figure 2 shows one possible embodiment of the computer and control apparatus 36 coupled to the transducer 34, it being understood that many other embodiments are possible for use with the present invention. A computer 70 controls a pulse echo system 72 by determining when to assert each acoustic pulse. The pulse echo system 72 preferably includes a pulser 74, a receiver 76 and a detector 78. The pulser 74 is connected to the transducer 34, where the transducer 34 is also connected to the receiver 76. The detector 78 is connected to the receiver 76 and to the computer 70. A memory system 80 is preferably connected to the computer 70 for storing software and data.

[0025] In operation, the computer 70 sends an activation signal to the pulser 74, which responsively applies a voltage signal to the transducer 34. The transducer 34 responds by generating an acoustic pulse. The computer 70 initiates an internal timer (not shown) approximately coincident with the activation signal sent to the pulser 74, indicating the approximate time that the transducer 34 initiates transmitting the acoustic pulse. The timer may be any type of digital timer as known to those skilled in the art, but generally is a binary counter. The transducer 34 receives the reflected acoustic pulse and converts it into electrical signals detected by the receiver 76. The receiver 76 transmits an amplified signal to the detector 78. The detector 78 sends a corresponding signal back to the computer 70, which then stops or otherwise reads the timer and stores its value corresponding to an RTT value. The detector 78 preferably includes rectification and filtering circuitry to identify the approximate time the transducer 34 receives the reflected acoustic pulse. When the reflected acoustic pulse is received, the detector 78 transmits a digital signal to the computer 70.

[0026] The computer and control apparatus 36 measures the elapsed RTT value for each acoustic pulse. In the preferred method of operation, a plurality of acoustic pulses are transmitted while the drillstring 20 rotates within the borehole, so that the computer 70

sends a plurality of signals to the pulser 74 and stores a plurality of RTT values in the memory 80. The transducer 34 typically transmits and receives each pulse before sending another pulse. In this manner, a plurality of pulses are transmitted and received throughout the entire diameter of the borehole wall 24 of the borehole, so that a plurality of RTT values are measured and stored by the computer and control apparatus 36. Each represents the stand-off distance SD at a given point along the circumference of the borehole wall 24. The rate of measurements depends on the desired accuracy and borehole conditions, but is typically between 100 to 200 samples per second. The computer and control apparatus 36 may either analyze these RTT values when received, or may store the RTT values, or may perform both of these functions.

[0027] In conventional rotary drilling operations, the entire drillstring 20 rotates about the central axis 32 during drilling operations, although some wobbling may occur. The drillstring 20 may float within the borehole while rotating, and is often side-walled against the borehole wall 24. The drillstring 20 is shown side-walled in Figure 1 against the borehole wall 24. When the drillstring 20 is side-walled, the MWD drill collar 26 is displaced from the borehole wall 24 by the radial difference (R2 - R1). In the preferred embodiment, it is desired that the transducer 34 be mounted on the MWD drill collar 26 as close to the tubular member 30 as possible. In this manner, when the drillstring 20 has rotated so that the transducer directly faces the borehole wall 24, and when the drillstring 20 is side-walled, the acoustic pulse travels a distance approximately equal to twice the radial difference R2-R1.

[0028] The actual distance of travel of the acoustic pulse may vary depending upon the surface condition of the borehole wall 24 and whether the drillstring 20 is actually side-walled. In general, when the drillstring 20 is side-walled against the borehole wall 24, and when the transducer 34 is directly facing the borehole wall 24, the measured RTT value is at a minimum, referred to as RTT_{min}. Field test data indicates that the drillstring 20 spends a significant amount of time side-walled against the borehole wall 24 during drilling operations, so that the measurement of the RTT_{min} value is made relatively frequently. Once the RTT_{min} value is measured, the sound speed of the drilling fluid 28 can be calculated using the following equation 1:

$$V = \frac{2(R2-R1)}{RTT_{min}}$$

where V is the sound speed of the drilling fluid 28.

[0029] Referring now to Figure 3a, a graph is shown illustrating a plot of RTT values measured versus elapsed time while the drillstring 20 is rotating in a borehole at approximately 40 rpm. The measurement rate was 150 RTT values per second, and a snap-shot of

about 3.3 seconds is shown. Elapsed time in seconds is provided on a horizontal axis, referred to as the x-axis, whereas time in microseconds (μs) corresponding to the expected RTT values is provided along the vertical axis, referred to as the y-axis. As shown in Figure 3a, the graph or snap-shot of RTT values generally resembles a sinusoidal wave having a period of approximately 1.5 seconds, corresponding to the 40 rpm rotation of the drillstring 20. At first, it is not known for sure whether the drillstring 20 is side-walled during this snap-shot. However, a periodic minimum of the waveform occurs approximately every 1.5 seconds, at approximately 1.25 and 2.75 seconds, respectively, corresponding to the transducer 34 directly facing the borehole wall 24. Several snap-shots are retrieved, stored and analyzed to determine whether they also include a periodic minimum. For those that do, the minimum values are compared to verify whether the minimum RTT values are the same, or within an expected statistical deviation. Thus, present minimum RTT values are compared to recent past minimum RTT values until it is plausible that the minimum RTT value correspond to the radial difference R2-R1.

[0030] The comparisons of snap-shots are performed using standard time and frequency domain techniques to determine the frequency of the minimum, the waveform frequency content, the departure from the minimum and other parameters as known to those skilled in statistics and data processing. Once it is verified that the minimum RTT values occurring at 1.25 and 2.75 seconds shown in Figure 3a plausibly correspond to the RTT_{\min} value, the sound speed V of the drilling fluid 28 may be readily derived using Equation 1. For example, if the radial difference R2-R1 is 0.3 inches and the RTT_{\min} value is approximately 12 μs , then the sound speed V of the drilling fluid 28 is approximately 50,000 inches per second (in/sec) or approximately 1270 m/s. Once the sound speed V has been calculated in this manner, each of the measured RTT values can be multiplied by the sound speed V and replotted on a graph illustrating stand-off distance SD, which is shown in Figure 3b.

[0031] In Figure 3b, the elapsed time in seconds is shown along the x-axis and stand-off distance SD measured in inches is provided along the y-axis. Therefore, Figure 3b shows the stand-off distance SD about the circumference of the borehole wall 24 at the longitudinal position, or depth, of the transducer 34.

[0032] Another type of rotary drilling, commonly referred to as turbodrilling, is used where the drillstring 20 does not rotate but generally slides within the borehole, although some rotation may occur. A fluid-drive turbine, commonly called a mud motor (not shown) is placed in the drillstring 20 just above the drill bit. The pressure from the pumps at the surface pumping the drilling fluid 28 down through the central bore of the drillstring 20 turns the mud motor, which rotates the drill bit. Turbodrilling may be used to drill boreholes at almost

any angle, including slanted or even horizontal boreholes. The techniques of the present invention apply to turbodrilling as well. Figure 1 may be viewed clockwise at any angle to illustrate a slanted borehole, where a 90° clockwise view illustrates a horizontal borehole. In this case, a downside or bottom side 40 of the borehole wall 24 is distinguished from a top side 42, where the drillstring 20 is shown resting against the bottom side 40. The drillstring 20 also slides along the bottom side 40 of the borehole wall 24 while the drill bit penetrates further into the formation. The principles are the same as for conventional rotary drilling, where the transducer 34 is still displaced from the borehole wall 24 by the radial difference R2-R1 when the transducer 34 directly faces the bottom side 40.

[0033] In the case of turbodrilling, the drillstring 20 is manipulated and oriented until the transducer 34 is directly facing the bottom side 40 of the borehole wall. Again, an upset or the tubular member 30 displaces the transducer 34 from the borehole wall 24 at approximately the radial difference R2-R1. Orientation of the drillstring 20 is accomplished with tools at the surface or entry point of the borehole, and by performing surveys with magnetometers and accelerometers as known to those having ordinary skill in the art. Once the orientation of the transducer 34 is verified, the RTT_{\min} value measurement is made as described above.

[0034] Referring now to Figure 4, a flow chart diagram is shown illustrating operation of software executing on the computer 70 of the computer and control apparatus 36. Operation begins at a step 50, and proceeds to a step 52 where it is queried whether the drillstring 20 is rotating within the borehole. As described above, the drillstring 20 is rotating during conventional rotary drilling operations and mostly sliding within the borehole during turbodrilling. The term "rotating" is used to describe any periodic movements of the drillstring 20, which is not necessarily a single-valued angular velocity. During turbodrilling, sliding may be accompanied by a slow rotation, but this is not always true.

[0035] If the drillstring 20 is rotating as determined in step 52, operation proceeds to a step 54 where it is queried whether the measured RTT values exhibit a periodic and repeatable minimum sequence. If so, then the minimum RTT values plausibly correspond to the RTT_{\min} value. In this case, it is determined whether the measured values calculated have the appearance of those obtained when the drillstring 20 is side-walled, where the tubular member 30 is contacting the borehole wall 24. As described previously, the RTT values should appear sinusoidal, indicating the transducer 34 is approaching and then receding from the borehole wall 24. If the pattern appears as expected, then the measurements are adequate to establish plausibility.

[0036] If the pattern is plausible as determined in step 54, operation proceeds to a step 56, where the minimum RTT value is compared with past minimum RTT values. It is not expected that the sound speed V of

the drilling fluid 28 changes abruptly, although there are a few exceptions. For example, sudden changes in the sound speed V of the drilling fluid 28 could occur if the drillstring 20 is not rotating, if pump circulation is interrupted, if there is a sudden influx of gas or formation fluids, or if there is a sudden addition of lost circulation materials (LCMs). LCMs are introduced into the borehole if the drilling tool encounters a large crack or cavity, where LCMs are used to fill the cavity to prevent substantial loss of hydrostatic pressure. Although abrupt changes are not expected except under certain conditions including those listed above, the sound speed V of the drilling fluid will change over time. An apparatus according to the present invention will monitor these changes.

[0037] If the present minimum RTT value compares to past minimum RTT values in step 56 indicating that the sound speed V has not appreciably changed, operation proceeds to step 58 where the sound speed V is calculated according to Equation 1. From step 58, operation proceeds to a step 60 to determine whether to repeat the sequence or terminate. If operation is to be terminated, operation proceeds to step 62 and terminates. Otherwise, operation proceeds back to step 52 to repeat the loop. If the pattern is not plausible as determined in step 54 or if the present minimum values do not compare with past values as determined in step 56, operation proceeds directly to step 60 to determine whether to repeat the loop.

[0038] Referring back to step 52, if the drillstring 20 is not rotating, operation proceeds to a step 64, where it is queried whether orientation of the drillstring relative to the borehole wall 24 can be verified. If it is verified that the drillstring 20 is resting on the bottom side 40 of the borehole wall 24 and that the transducer 34 is facing the borehole wall 24, operation proceeds to a step 58 where the sound speed V is calculated using Equation 1. Since it is known that the transducer 34 is displaced from the borehole wall 24 by the radial difference $R2-R1$, procedures similar to those of steps 54 and 56 for determination of a repeatable and plausible minimum RTT value are unnecessary.

[0039] The storing, retrieving and analyzing of the plurality of RTT values and elapsed time values in the form of snap-shots as described above requires some form of apparatus for measuring real-time, as well as an appreciable amount of memory for storing the RTT values and corresponding elapsed time values. Also, the software must include known routines capable of verifying a periodic, repeating minimum value to arrive at the RTT_{min} value. An alternative technique for measuring the sound speed V of the drilling fluid 28 is the use of stand-off histograms, which may be constructed from the snap-shot data, but which may also be developed in real-time. In the latter case, the elapsed real-time values would not need to be measured or stored.

[0040] The histogram comprises a plurality of contiguous or sequential columns or bins within an

expected total range of RTT values. Each bin is a count which corresponds to a predetermined sub-range of time within the total range, where each RTT value falling within the defined sub-range of time belongs to the corresponding bin. For example, if a total expected range of RTT values is 16 μs , 16 bins could be defined, each having a duration of 1 μs . The first bin is defined for 0-1 μs , the second bin is 1-2 μs and so on. An RTT value falling within the sub-range of time corresponding to a bin causes that bin to be incremented. Thus, if an RTT value of 1.5 μs is received, the second bin is incremented.

[0041] The number of bins and their sub-ranges bins may be varied, where some bins represent shorter or narrower sub-ranges than others. The width of the bins define the resolution desired for the measurement to be made. For example, if the radial difference is 0.3 inches and RTT_{min} should range between 8.4 μs and 13.9 μs , about 100 bins could be defined between 5 and 15 μs , where each bin represents 0.1 μs . The lowest bin having the highest count number would plausibly correspond to the RTT_{min} value. In particular, if a small number of counts, such as 3 or less, occur in the first 51 bins and 40 counts occur in bin 52 corresponding to an RTT value of 10.2 μs , then the sound speed V of the drilling fluid would be approximately 58,824 in/sec. In this manner, the RTT_{min} value is determined without having to store a plurality of RTT values and corresponding real-time values. Only a plurality of counts need be stored, which consumes very little memory.

[0042] It can now be appreciated that the MWD apparatus and technique of the present invention provides an accurate determination of sound speed V of the drilling fluid and the stand-off distance using a single acoustic transducer. The transducer is mounted on an MWD collar close to an upset or stabilizer blade, where the radius of the stabilizer blade or upset is greater than the radius of the MWD collar. In this manner, it need only be verified when the drillstring is resting or side-walled against and the transducer directly facing the borehole wall for the transducer to be displaced at a known distance from the borehole wall. In particular, this minimum distance is the radial difference between the MWD collar and the stabilizer blade or upset.

[0043] Verification of the RTT_{min} value corresponding to the minimum distance is achieved using conventional statistical analysis techniques. In conventional rotary drilling situations, the RTT values are analyzed for a repeating, period minimum value. Alternatively, stand-off histograms are used to identify a high occurrence of a minimum RTT value or range, which corresponds to the RTT_{min} value.

[0044] The foregoing disclosure and description of the invention are illustrative and explanatory thereof, and various changes in the size, shape, materials, components, circuit elements, wiring connections and contacts, as well as in the details of the illustrated circuitry and construction and method of operation may be made

without departing from the invention. Various modifications of the techniques, procedures, material and equipment will be apparent to those skilled in the art. It is intended that all such variations within the scope of the appended claims be embraced thereby.

Claims

1. An MWD apparatus for measuring standoff (SD) in a borehole (22), the borehole (22) having a borehole wall (24), wherein the standoff (SD) is the distance between the MWD apparatus and the borehole wall (24) and the measurement is made in the presence of a drilling fluid (28) in the borehole (22), the MWD apparatus comprising:

a drillstring (20) for drilling the borehole (22), said drillstring immersed in the drilling fluid (28);
 a first tubular member (30) provided on said drillstring, said first tubular member having a radius R2;
 a second tubular member (26) mounted with said first tubular member along said drillstring (20), said second tubular member having a radius R1, wherein R1 is less than R2;
 an acoustic transducer (34) mounted on said second tubular member (26) at a position near said first tubular member (30) so that said transducer is separated from the borehole wall (24) by approximately the radial difference R2-R1 when the drillstring (20) and said first tubular member (30) are side-walled against the borehole wall (24) and when said second tubular member (26) is oriented so that said transducer (34) faces the borehole wall (24), said transducer (34) including means for transmitting, receiving and detecting acoustic pulses;
 a computer and control apparatus (36) electrically coupled to said transducer (34) for activating said transducer (34) to transmit an acoustic pulse and detecting
 when said transducer (34) receives an echo acoustic pulse, for measuring the round trip transit time between each transmitted pulse generated by said transducer and its associated echo acoustic pulse, for analyzing a plurality of round trip transit time values to determine a minimum round trip transit time value corresponding to said transducer (34) being separated from the borehole wall (24) by the radial difference R2-R1, for calculating the sound speed (V) of the drilling fluid (28) as twice the radial difference R2-R1 divided by said minimum round trip transit time value, and for calculating standoff distance of said transducer (34) by multiplying said sound speed (V) of the drilling fluid (28) by one half the value of

said round trip times.

2. The MWD apparatus of claim 1, wherein said second tubular member is an MWD drill collar (26).
3. The MWD apparatus of claim 1 or 2, wherein said first tubular member (30) comprises upset tubing.
4. The MWD apparatus of claim 1 or 2, wherein said first tubular member comprises a stabilizer blade.
5. The MWD apparatus of any of claims 1 to 4, wherein said computer and control apparatus (36) includes:

a computer (70) for asserting a pulse signal to initiate said transducer (34) to transmit an acoustic pulse and for receiving an echo signal indicating that said transducer has detected an echo acoustic pulse;
 a control circuit coupled to said computer and said transducer, wherein said control apparatus includes:
 a pulser (74) coupled to said computer (70) and said transducer (34), said pulser (74) receiving said pulse signal from said computer and activating said transducer in response,
 a receiver (76) coupled to said transducer for receiving and amplifying electrical signals generated by said transducer (34) in response to receiving said echo acoustic pulse, and
 a detector (78) coupled to said receiver and said computer (70) for receiving said amplified electrical signals from said receiver (76) and providing said echo signal to said computer in response.

6. The MWD apparatus of any preceding claim, wherein said computer and control apparatus (36) analyzes said plurality of round trip transit time values to determine whether a periodic and repeated minimum round trip transit time value is measured.
7. The MWD apparatus of any preceding claim, wherein said computer and control apparatus (36) retrieves a plurality of round trip transit time values and corresponding real-time values into a snapshot, and further retrieves a plurality of snapshots to determine if a periodic minimum round trip transit time value has occurred and whether said minimum periodic round trip transit time value has been repeated in said plurality of snap-shots.
8. The MWD apparatus of any of claims 1 to 5, wherein said computer and control apparatus (36) divides a predetermined total range of expected round trip transit time values into a plurality of contiguous bins, each said bin representing a subrange

of said total range of expected round trip transit time values, and wherein said computer measures each round trip transit time value and increments a corresponding bin.

9. The MWD apparatus of claim 8, wherein said computer and control apparatus (36) receives a plurality of round trip transit time values and increments said corresponding bins, and determines said minimum round trip transit time value from a bin having the greatest count corresponding to the least round trip transit time value.

10. The MWD apparatus of claim 1, further comprising

apparatus for manipulating and orientating said drillstring (20);

apparatus to verify that said drillstring (20) is side walled against the borehole wall (24) and that the drillstring (20) is oriented so that said transducer (34) is facing the borehole wall (24) at the radial position wherein said drillstring (20) is side walled; and

wherein said drillstring (20) can be manipulated and oriented so that said transducer (34) is facing the borehole wall (24) at the radial position wherein said drillstring (20) is side walled, and wherein said computer and control apparatus (36) activates said transducer (34) to send an acoustic pulse and detects an associated echo acoustic pulse to measure said minimum round trip transit time value.

11. The MWD apparatus of claim 10, wherein said verifying apparatus comprises magnetometers and accelerometers.

12. The MWD apparatus of claim 10 or 11, wherein said second tubular member is an MWD drill collar (26).

13. A MWD method for measuring stand off in a borehole (22), the borehole (22) having a borehole wall (24) wherein the measurement is made in the presence of drilling fluid (28) in the borehole (22), the method comprising:

providing a drillstring (20) for drilling the borehole (22), said drillstring (20) immersed in the drilling fluid (28);

providing a first tubular member (30) provided on said drillstring (20), said first tubular member (30) having a radius R2;

providing a second tubular member mounted with said first tubular member (30) along said drillstring, said second tubular member having a radius R1, wherein R1 is less than R2;

providing an acoustic transducer (34) mounted

on said second tubular member at a position near said first tubular member (30) so that said transducer (34) is separated from the borehole wall (24) by approximately the radial difference R2-R1 when the drillstring (20) and said first tubular member (30) are side walled against the borehole wall (24) and when said second tubular member is oriented so that said transducer (34) faces the borehole wall (24), said transducer (34) being means for transmitting, receiving and detecting acoustic pulses;

providing a computer and control apparatus (36) electrically coupled to said transducer (34) for activating said transducer (34) to transmit an acoustic pulse and detecting when said transducer (34) receives an echo acoustic pulse, measuring the round trip transit time between each transmitted pulse generated by said transducer (34) and its associated echo acoustic pulse, analyzing a plurality of round trip transit time values to determine a minimum round trip transit time value corresponding to said transducer (34) being separated from the borehole wall (24) by the radial difference R2-R1, calculating the sound speed of the drilling fluid (V) as twice the radial difference R2-R1 divided by said minimum round trip transit time value, and calculating corresponding stand off of said transducer (34) by multiplying said sound speed of the drilling fluid (V) by one half of the value of said round trip transit times.

14. The method of Claim 13 wherein said second tubular member is an MWD drill collar (26).

15. The method of Claim 13 or 14, wherein said first tubular member (30) comprises upset tubing.

16. The method of Claim 13 or 14, wherein said first tubular member (30) comprises a stabilizer blade.

17. The method of any of claims 13-16, wherein said computer and control apparatus (36) is operated by:

(a) asserting a pulse signal to initiate said transducer (34) to transmit an acoustic pulse and receiving an echo signal indicating that said transducer (34) has detected an echo acoustic pulse;

(b) providing a control circuit coupled to said computer (70) and to said transducer (34), wherein said control apparatus:

(1) activates said transducer (34) upon receiving said pulse signal from said computer (70);

(2) receives and amplifies signals gener-

ated by said transducer (34) in response to receiving said echo acoustic pulse; and
(3) detects said amplified signals and provides said echo signal to said computer (70) in response.

18. The method of any of claims 13 to 17, wherein said computer and control apparatus (36) analyzes said plurality of round trip transit time values to determine whether a periodic and repeated minimum round trip transit time value is measured. 10
19. The method of any of claims 13 to 18, wherein a plurality of round trip transit time values for a predetermined period of elapsed time are acquired and stored as a function of real time values into a snapshot, a plurality of said snap-shots are acquired and stored, and said snapshots are analyzed to determine whether a periodic minimum round trip transit time value has occurred and whether said minimum periodic round trip transit time value has been repeated in said plurality of snap-shots. 15 20
20. The method of any of claims 13 to 17, wherein said computer and control apparatus (70) divides a predetermined total range of expected round trip transit time values into a plurality of contiguous bins, each said bin representing a subrange of said total range of expected round trip transit time values, and wherein said computer measures each round trip transit time value and increments a corresponding bin. 25 30
21. The method of Claim 20 wherein said computer and control apparatus (70) receives a plurality of round trip transit time values and increments said corresponding bins, and determines said minimum round trip transit time value from a bin having the greatest count corresponding to the least round trip transit time value. 35 40
22. The method of claim 13 further comprising
providing an apparatus for manipulating and orienting said drillstring (20); 45
providing an apparatus for verifying that said drillstring (20) is side-walled against the borehole (22) and that said drillstring (20) is oriented so that said transducer (34) is facing the borehole wall (24) at the radial position wherein said drillstring (20) is side-walled; and
wherein said drillstring (20) is manipulated and oriented so that said transducer (34) is facing the borehole wall (24) at the radial position wherein said drillstring (20) is side-walled, and wherein said computer and control apparatus (36) activates said transducer (34) to send an acoustic pulse and detects an associated echo 55

acoustic pulse to measure said minimum round trip transit time value.

23. The MWD method of claim 22, wherein said verifying apparatus measures magnetic and gravity vectors. 5
24. The MWD method of claim 22 or 23, wherein said second tubular member is an MWD drill collar (26) in the drillstring. 10
25. The method of claim 13 wherein the method of measuring the sound speed of drilling fluid in a borehole, includes the steps of:
providing acoustic transmitter and receiver means on a drillstring in the borehole;
measuring a roundtrip time taken for a signal to travel from the transmitter and receiver means to the borehole wall and back;
arranging for a portion of the drillstring to extend radially a known distance further than the transmitter and receiver means, such that when this portion contacts the borehole wall, the transmitter and receiver means lie at approximately said known distance from the borehole wall; and
calculating the sound speed of the drilling fluid by dividing said known distance by half a roundtrip time determined to have been obtained when said drillstring portion is contacting said wall and said transmitter and receiver means are facing said wall.
26. The method of claim 25, wherein the drillstring is rotated, a plurality of roundtrip times are determined, and a minimum value of said roundtrip times is determined to be a roundtrip time obtained when said drillstring portion is contacting the borehole wall and the transmitter and receiver means are facing the borehole wall. 40
27. The method of claim 25, wherein a determination that the drillstring portion is contacting the borehole wall and the transmitter and receiver means are facing the wall is made using sensors mounted on the drillstring. 45
28. The MWD apparatus of claim 1 wherein the apparatus for measuring sound speed of drilling fluid in a borehole, comprises acoustic transmitter and receiver means mounted on the drillstring; 50

means for determining a roundtrip time taken for a signal to travel from the transmitter and receiver means to the borehole wall and back; a drillstring portion extending radially a known distance further than the transmitter and

receiver means, such that when the portion contacts the wall of the borehole, the transmitter and receiver means is spaced from the borehole wall a distance approximately equal to the known distance; and

means for calculating the sound speed of the drilling fluid by dividing said known distance by a roundtrip time determined to have been obtained when said drillstring portion contacts the wall of the borehole and the transmitter and receiving means faces the wall.

Patentansprüche

1. Vorrichtung zur während des Bohrvorgangs durchgeführten Messung (MWD) des Abstands (SD) in einem Bohrloch (22), das eine Bohrlochwand (24) aufweist, wobei es sich bei dem Abstand (SD) um die Entfernung zwischen der MWD-Vorrichtung und der Bohrlochwand (24) handelt und die Messung in Gegenwart eines Spülschlamms (28) im Bohrloch (22) durchgeführt wird, wobei die MWD-Vorrichtung folgendes umfaßt :

ein Bohrgestänge (20) zum Bohren des Bohrlochs (22), wobei das Bohrgestänge in den Spülschlamm (28) eingetaucht ist;
 ein erstes röhrenförmiges Glied (30), das an dem Bohrgestänge vorgesehen ist und einen Radius R2 aufweist;
 ein zweites röhrenförmiges Glied (26), das mit dem ersten röhrenförmigen Glied entlang dem Bohrgestänge (20) angebracht ist und einen Radius R1 aufweist, wobei R1 kleiner ist als R2;
 einen akustischen Wandler (34), der in einer in der Nähe des ersten röhrenförmigen Glieds (30) gelegenen Position an dem zweiten röhrenförmigen Glied (26) so angebracht ist, daß der Wandler von der Bohrlochwand (24) durch ungefähr die radiale Differenz R2-R1 getrennt ist, wenn das Bohrgestänge (20) und das erste röhrenförmige Glied (30) an der Bohrlochwand (24) anliegen und wenn das zweite röhrenförmige Glied (26) so ausgerichtet ist, daß der Wandler (34) zu der Bohrlochwand (24) weist, wobei der Wandler (34) Mittel zur Übertragung, zum Empfang und zur Erfassung von akustischen Impulsen umfaßt;
 eine Rechner- und Steuervorrichtung (36), die mit dem Wandler (34) elektrisch verbunden ist, um ihn (34) zur Übertragung eines akustischen Impulses anzusteuern, und zu erfassen, wann der Wandler (34) einen akustischen Echoimpuls empfängt, um die Umlaufzeit zwischen jedem von dem Wandler erzeugten übertragenen Impuls und dem ihm zugeordneten akustischen Echoimpuls zu messen, um

mehrere Umlaufzeitwerte zur Bestimmung eines Umlaufmindestzeitwertes, der dem durch die radiale Differenz R2-R1 von der Bohrlochwand (24) getrennten Wandler (34) entspricht, zu analysieren, um die Schallgeschwindigkeit (V) des Spülschlamms (28) als zweimal die radiale Differenz R2-R1 geteilt durch den Umlaufmindestzeitwert zu berechnen und um den Abstand des Wandlers (34) durch Multiplizieren der Schallgeschwindigkeit (V) des Spülschlamms (28) mit dem halben Wert der Umlaufzeiten zu berechnen.

2. MWD-Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 1, bei der es sich bei dem zweiten röhrenförmigen Glied um eine MWD-Schwerstange (26) handelt.
3. MWD-Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 1 oder 2, bei der das erste röhrenförmige Glied (30) ein Rohr mit Anstauchung umfaßt.
4. MWD-Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 1 oder 2, bei der das erste röhrenförmige Glied eine Führungsmuffe umfaßt.
5. MWD-Vorrichtung nach einem der Ansprüche 1 bis 4, bei der die Rechner- und Steuervorrichtung (36) folgendes enthält:

einen Rechner (70) zur Erzeugung eines Impulssignals zur Ansteuerung des Wandlers (34) zur Übertragung eines akustischen Impulses und zum Empfang eines Echosignals, das anzeigt, daß der Wandler einen akustischen Echoimpuls erfaßt hat;
 einen mit dem Rechner und dem Wandler verbundenen Steuerkreis, wobei die Steuervorrichtung folgendes enthält:
 einen mit dem Rechner (70) und dem Wandler (34) verbundenen Impulsgenerator (74), der das Impulssignal von dem Rechner empfängt und den Wandler als Reaktion darauf ansteuert,
 einen mit dem Wandler verbundenen Empfänger (76) zum Empfangen und Verstärken von von dem Wandler (34) als Reaktion auf den Empfang des akustischen Impulses erzeugten elektrischen Signalen, und
 einen mit dem Empfänger und dem Rechner (70) verbundenen Detektor (78) zum Empfangen der verstärkten elektrischen Signale von dem Empfänger (76) und Liefern des Echosignals an den Rechner als Reaktion darauf.

6. MWD-Vorrichtung nach einem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche, bei der die Rechner- und Steuervorrichtung (36) die mehreren Umlaufzeitwerte analysiert, um festzustellen, ob ein periodischer und

wiederholter Umlaufmindestzeitwert gemessen wird.

7. MWD-Vorrichtung nach einem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche, bei der die Rechner- und Steuervorrichtung (36) mehrere Umlaufzeitwerte und entsprechende Echtzeitwerte in einer Momentaufnahme wiedergewinnt und des weiteren mehrere Momentaufnahmen wiedergewinnt, um festzustellen, ob ein periodischer Umlaufmindestzeitwert aufgetreten ist und ob der Umlaufmindestzeitwert in den mehreren Momentaufnahmen wiederholt wurde. 10
8. MWD-Vorrichtung nach einem der Ansprüche 1 bis 5, bei der die Rechner- und Steuervorrichtung (36) einen vorbestimmten Gesamtbereich erwarteter Umlaufzeitwerte in mehrere aneinanderangrenzende Abstandstore teilt, wobei jedes Abstandstor einen Unterbereich des Gesamtbereichs erwarteter Umlaufzeitwerte darstellt und wobei der Rechner jeden Umlaufzeitwert mißt und ein entsprechendes Abstandstor inkrementiert. 15 20
9. MWD-Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 8, bei der die Rechner- und Steuervorrichtung (36) mehrere Umlaufzeitwerte empfängt und die entsprechenden Abstandstore inkrementiert sowie den Umlaufmindestzeitwert von einem Abstandstor mit der höchsten Zählung bestimmt, die dem kleinsten Umlaufzeitwert entspricht. 25 30
10. MWD-Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 1, die weiterhin folgendes umfaßt: 35
eine Vorrichtung zur Handhabung und Ausrichtung des Bohrgestänges (20);
eine Vorrichtung zur Überprüfung, ob das Bohrgestänge (20) an der Bohrlochwand (24) anliegt und ob das Bohrgestänge (20) so ausgerichtet ist, daß der Wandler (34) in der radialen Position, in der das Bohrgestänge (20) anliegt, zu der Bohrlochwand (24) weist; und
bei der das Bohrgestänge (20) so gehandhabt und ausgerichtet werden kann, daß der Wandler (34) in der radialen Position, in der das Bohrgestänge (20) anliegt, zu der Bohrlochwand (24) weist, und bei der die Rechner- und Steuervorrichtung (36) den Wandler (34) so ansteuert, daß dieser einen akustischen Impuls sendet und einen zugeordneten akustischen Echoimpuls erfaßt, um den Umlaufmindestzeitwert zu erfassen. 40 45 50
11. MWD-Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 10, bei der die Überprüfungsvorrichtung Magnetometer und Beschleunigungsmesser umfaßt. 55

12. MWD-Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 10 oder 11, bei der es sich bei dem zweiten röhrenförmigen Glied um eine MWD-Schwerstange (26) handelt.

13. MWD-Verfahren zur Abstandsmessung in einem Bohrloch (22), wobei das Bohrloch (22) eine Bohrlochwand (24) aufweist und die Messung in Gegenwart eines Spülschlammes (28) im Bohrloch (22) durchgeführt wird, wobei man bei dem Verfahren

ein Bohrgestänge (20) zum Bohren des Bohrlochs (22) bereitstellt und das Bohrgestänge (20) in den Spülschlamm (28) eingetaucht ist; ein erstes röhrenförmiges Glied (30) bereitstellt, das an dem Bohrgestänge (20) vorgesehen ist und einen Radius R2 aufweist; ein zweites röhrenförmiges Glied bereitstellt, das mit dem ersten röhrenförmigen Glied (30) entlang dem Bohrgestänge angebracht ist und einen Radius R1 aufweist, wobei R1 kleiner ist als R2; einen akustischen Wandler (34) bereitstellt, der in einer in der Nähe des ersten röhrenförmigen Glieds (30) gelegenen Position an dem zweiten röhrenförmigen Glied so angebracht ist, daß der Wandler (34) von der Bohrlochwand (24) durch ungefähr die radiale Differenz R2-R1 getrennt ist, wenn das Bohrgestänge (20) und das erste röhrenförmige Glied (30) an der Bohrlochwand (24) anliegen und wenn das zweite röhrenförmige Glied so ausgerichtet ist, daß der Wandler (34) zu der Bohrlochwand (24) weist, wobei der Wandler (34) Mittel zur Übertragung, zum Empfang und zur Erfassung von akustischen Impulsen ist; eine Rechner- und Steuervorrichtung (36) bereitstellt, die mit dem Wandler (34) elektrisch verbunden ist, um den Wandler (34) zur Übertragung eines akustischen Impulses anzusteuern, und zu erfassen wann der Wandler (34) einen akustischen Echoimpuls empfängt, um die Umlaufzeit zwischen jedem von dem Wandler (34) erzeugten übertragenen Impuls und dem ihm zugeordneten akustischen Echoimpuls zu messen, um mehrere Umlaufzeitwerte zur Bestimmung eines Umlaufmindestzeitwertes, der dem durch die radiale Differenz R2-R1 von der Bohrlochwand (24) getrennten Wandler (34) entspricht, zu analysieren, um die Schallgeschwindigkeit des Spülschlammes (V) als zweimal die radiale Differenz R2-R1 geteilt durch den Umlaufmindestzeitwert zu berechnen und um den entsprechenden Abstand des Wandlers (34) durch Multiplizieren der Schallgeschwindigkeit des Spülschlammes (V) mit dem halben Wert der Umlaufzeiten zu berechnen.

14. Verfahren nach Anspruch 13, bei dem es sich bei dem zweiten röhrenförmigen Glied um eine MWD-Schwerstange (26) handelt.
15. Verfahren nach Anspruch 13 oder 14, bei dem das erste röhrenförmige Glied (30) ein Rohr mit Anstauung umfaßt.
16. Verfahren nach Anspruch 13 oder 14, bei dem das erste röhrenförmige Glied (30) eine Führungsmuffe umfaßt.
17. Verfahren nach einem der Ansprüche 13 - 16, bei dem die Rechner- und Steuervorrichtung (36) durch folgendes betrieben wird:
- (a) Erzeugen eines Impulssignals zur Ansteuerung des Wandlers (34) zur Übertragung eines akustischen Impulses und Empfangen eines Echosignals, das anzeigt, daß der Wandler (34) einen akustischen Echoimpuls erfaßt hat; (b) Bereitstellen eines mit dem Rechner (70) und dem Wandler (34) verbundenen Steuerkreises, wobei die Steuervorrichtung:
- (1) den Wandler (34) bei Empfang des Impulssignals von dem Rechner (70) aktiviert; (2) von dem Wandler (34) als Reaktion auf den Empfang des akustischen Echoimpulses erzeugte Signale empfängt und verstärkt; und (3) die verstärkten Signale erfaßt und das Echosignal als Reaktion darauf an den Rechner (70) liefert.
18. Verfahren nach einem der Ansprüche 13 bis 17, bei dem die Rechner- und Steuervorrichtung (36) die mehreren Umlaufzeitwerte analysiert, um festzustellen, ob ein periodischer und wiederholter Umlaufmindestzeitwert gemessen wird.
19. Verfahren nach einem der Ansprüche 13 bis 18, bei dem mehrere Umlaufzeitwerte für eine vorbestimmte, verstrichene Zeitdauer erworben und als Funktion von Echtzeitwerten in einer Momentaufnahme gespeichert werden, mehrere der Momentaufnahmen erworben und gespeichert und die Momentaufnahmen analysiert werden, um festzustellen, ob ein periodischer Umlaufmindestzeitwert aufgetreten ist und ob der periodische Umlaufmindestzeitwert in den mehreren Momentaufnahmen wiederholt worden ist.
20. Verfahren nach einem der Ansprüche 13 bis 17, bei dem die Rechner- und Steuervorrichtung (36) einen vorbestimmten Gesamtbereich erwarteter Umlaufzeitwerte in mehrere aneinanderangrenzende Abstandstore teilt, wobei jedes Abstandstor einen Unterbereich des Gesamtbereichs erwarteter Umlaufzeitwerte darstellt und wobei der Rechner jeden Umlaufzeitwert mißt und ein entsprechendes Abstandstor inkrementiert.
21. Verfahren nach Anspruch 20, bei dem die Rechner- und Steuervorrichtung (36) mehrere Umlaufzeitwerte empfängt und die entsprechenden Abstandstore inkrementiert sowie den Umlaufmindestzeitwert von einem Abstandstor mit der höchsten Zählung bestimmt, das dem kleinsten Umlaufzeitwert entspricht.
22. Verfahren nach Anspruch 13, bei dem man weiterhin eine Vorrichtung zur Handhabung und Ausrichtung des Bohrgestänges (20) bereitstellt; eine Vorrichtung zur Überprüfung, ob das Bohrgestänge (20) an dem Bohrloch (22) anliegt und ob das Bohrgestänge (20) so ausgerichtet ist, daß der Wandler (34) in der radialen Position, in der das Bohrgestänge (20) anliegt, zu der Bohrlochwand (24) weist, bereitstellt; und bei dem das Bohrgestänge (20) so gehandhabt und ausgerichtet wird, daß der Wandler (34) in der radialen Position, in der das Bohrgestänge (20) anliegt, zu der Bohrlochwand (24) weist, und bei der die Rechner- und Steuervorrichtung (36) den Wandler (34) so ansteuert, daß dieser einen akustischen Impuls sendet und einen zugeordneten akustischen Echoimpuls erfaßt, um den Umlaufmindestzeitwert zu messen.
23. MWD-Verfahren nach Anspruch 22, bei dem die Überprüfungsvorrichtung magnetische und Schwerkraftvektoren mißt.
24. MWD-Verfahren nach Anspruch 22 oder 23, bei dem es sich bei dem zweiten röhrenförmigen Glied um eine MWD-Schwerstange (26) in dem Bohrgestänge handelt.
25. Verfahren nach Anspruch 13, bei dem man bei dem Verfahren zur Messung der Schallgeschwindigkeit von Spülschlamm in einem Bohrloch akustische Sende- und Empfangsmittel an einem Bohrgestänge in dem Bohrloch bereitstellt; eine für den Lauf eines Signals von den Sende- und Empfangsmitteln zu der Bohrlochwand und zurück benötigte Umlaufzeit mißt; eine solche Anordnung vorsieht, daß sich ein Teil des Bohrgestänges um eine bekannte Entfernung radial weiter erstreckt als die Sende-

und Empfangsmittel, so daß, wenn dieser Teil die Bohrlachwand berührt, die Sende- und Empfangsmittel in ungefähr der bekannten Entfernung von der Bohrlachwand liegen; und die Schallgeschwindigkeit des Spülschlammes durch Teilen der bekannten Entfernung durch die halbe Umlaufzeit berechnet, die als dann erhalten ermittelt wurde, wenn der Bohrgestänge die Bohrlachwand berührt und die Sende- und Empfangsmittel zur Wand weisen.

26. Verfahren nach Anspruch 25, bei dem das Bohrgestänge gedreht wird, mehrere Umlaufzeiten ermittelt werden und ein Mindestwert der Umlaufzeiten als Umlaufzeit als dann erhalten ermittelt wird, wenn der Bohrgestänge die Bohrlachwand berührt und die Sende- und Empfangsmittel zur Bohrlachwand weisen.

27. Verfahren nach Anspruch 25, bei dem unter Verwendung von an dem Bohrgestänge angebrachten Sensoren ermittelt wird, ob der Bohrgestänge die Bohrlachwand berührt und die Sende- und Empfangsmittel zur Wand weisen.

28. MWD-Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 1, bei der die Vorrichtung zur Messung von Schallgeschwindigkeit von Spülschlamm in einem Bohrloch folgendes umfaßt:

an dem Bohrgestänge angebrachte akustische Sende- und Empfangsmittel;
ein Mittel zur Ermittlung einer für den Lauf eines Signals von den Sende- und Empfangsmitteln zu der Bohrlachwand und zurück benötigten Umlaufzeit;
einen Bohrgestänge, der sich radial um eine bekannte Entfernung weiter als die Sende- und Empfangsmittel erstreckt, so daß, wenn der Teil die Bohrlachwand berührt, die Sende- und Empfangsmittel um eine Entfernung von der Bohrlachwand beabstandet sind, die ungefähr gleich der bekannten Entfernung ist; und
ein Mittel zur Berechnung der Schallgeschwindigkeit des Spülschlammes durch Teilen der bekannten Entfernung durch eine Umlaufzeit, die als dann erhalten ermittelt wird, wenn der Bohrgestänge die Wand des Bohrlochs berührt und die Sende- und Empfangsmittel zur Wand weisen.

Revendications

1. Dispositif MWD pour mesurer une distance d'écartement (SD) dans un puits de forage (22), le puits (22) possédant une paroi (24), dans lequel la distance d'écartement (SD) est la distance entre le dispositif MWD et la paroi (24) du puits, et la

mesure est effectuée en présence d'un fluide de forage (28) dans le puits (22), le dispositif MWD comprenant :

un train de tiges (20) servant à forer le puits (22), ledit train de tiges étant immergé dans le fluide de forage (28);

un premier élément tubulaire (30) prévu sur ledit train de tiges, ledit élément tubulaire possédant un rayon R2;

un second élément tubulaire (26) monté avec ledit premier élément tubulaire le long dudit train de tiges (20), ledit second élément tubulaire possédant un rayon R1, R1 étant inférieur à R2;

un transducteur acoustique (34) monté sur ledit second élément tubulaire (26) dans une position proche dudit premier élément tubulaire (30) de sorte que ledit transducteur est séparé de la paroi (24) du puits approximativement par la différence radiale (R2-R1) lorsque la paroi latérale du train de tiges (20) et dudit premier élément tubulaire (30) sont appliqués contre la paroi (24) du puits et lorsque ledit second élément tubulaire (26) est orienté de telle sorte que ledit transducteur (34) est tourné vers la paroi (24) du puits, ledit transducteur (34) comprenant des moyens pour émettre, recevoir et détecter des impulsions acoustiques;

un ordinateur / dispositif de commande (36) couplé électriquement audit transducteur (34) pour activer ledit transducteur (34) pour qu'il émette une impulsion acoustique et détecte le moment où ledit transducteur (34) reçoit une impulsion acoustique d'écho, pour mesurer le temps de transit aller et retour entre chaque impulsion émise produite par ledit transducteur et l'impulsion acoustique d'écho qui lui est associée, pour analyser une pluralité de valeurs de temps de transit aller et retour afin de déterminer une valeur de temps de transit aller et retour minimale correspondant au fait que ledit transducteur (34) est séparé de la paroi (24) du puits par la différence radiale R2-R1, pour calculer la vitesse du son (V) dans le fluide de forage (28) en tant que double de la différence radiale R2-R1 divisée par ladite valeur de temps de transit aller-retour minimale, et pour calculer une distance d'écartement dudit transducteur (34) par multiplication de ladite vitesse du son (V) dans le fluide de forage (28) par la moitié de la valeur desdits temps de transit aller et retour.

3. Dispositif MWD selon la revendication 1 ou 2, dans lequel ledit premier élément tubulaire (30) comprend un tubage à renflement.
4. Dispositif MWD selon la revendication 1 ou 2, dans lequel ledit premier élément tubulaire comprend une lame de stabilisation.
5. Dispositif MWD selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 à 4, dans lequel ledit ordinateur / dispositif de commande (36) comprend :
 - un ordinateur (70) pour activer un signal impulsif pour déclencher ledit transducteur (34) pour qu'il émette une impulsion acoustique et reçoive un signal d'écho indiquant que ledit transducteur a détecté une impulsion acoustique d'écho;
 - un circuit de commande couplé audit ordinateur et audit transducteur, ledit dispositif de commande comprenant :
 - un dispositif (74) de production d'impulsions couplé audit ordinateur (70) et audit transducteur (34), ledit dispositif (74) de production d'impulsions recevant ledit signal impulsif de la part dudit ordinateur et activant, en réponse, ledit transducteur;
 - un récepteur (76) couplé audit transducteur pour recevoir et amplifier des signaux électriques produits par ledit transducteur (34) en réponse à la réception de ladite impulsion acoustique d'écho, et
 - un détecteur (78) couplé audit récepteur et audit ordinateur (70) pour recevoir lesdits signaux électriques amplifiés de la part dudit récepteur (76) et envoyer, en réponse, ledit signal d'écho audit ordinateur.
6. Dispositif MWD selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, dans lequel ledit ordinateur / dispositif de commande (36) analyse ladite pluralité des valeurs de temps de transit aller et retour pour déterminer si une valeur de temps de transit aller et retour minimale périodique et répétée est mesurée.
7. Dispositif MWD selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, dans lequel ledit ordinateur / dispositif de commande (36) récupère une pluralité des valeurs de temps de transit aller et retour et des valeurs en temps réel correspondantes dans un enregistrement, et récupère en outre une pluralité d'enregistrements pour déterminer si une valeur de temps de transit aller et retour minimale périodique est apparue et si ladite valeur de temps de transit aller et retour minimale périodique a été répétée dans ladite pluralité d'enregistrements.
8. Dispositif MWD selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 à 5, dans lequel ledit ordinateur / dispositif de commande (36) divise la gamme totale prédéterminée de valeurs de temps de transit aller et retour attendues en une pluralité de créneaux contigus, chacun desdits créneaux représentant une partie de ladite gamme totale de valeurs de temps de transit aller et retour attendues, et dans lequel ledit ordinateur mesure chaque valeur de temps de transit aller et retour et incrémente un créneau correspondant.
9. Dispositif MWD selon la revendication 8, dans lequel ledit ordinateur / dispositif de commande (36) reçoit une pluralité de valeurs de temps de transit aller et retour et incrémente lesdits créneaux correspondants, et détermine ladite valeur de temps de transit aller et retour minimale à partir d'un créneau possédant la valeur de comptage maximale correspondant à la valeur de temps de transit aller et retour minimale.
10. Dispositif MWD selon la revendication 1, comprenant en outre
 - un dispositif pour manipuler et orienter ledit train de tiges (20);
 - un dispositif pour vérifier que la paroi latérale dudit train de tiges (20) est appliquée contre la paroi (24) du puits et que le train de tiges (20) est orienté de telle sorte que ledit transducteur (34) est tourné vers la paroi (24) du puits, dans la position radiale dans laquelle la paroi latérale dudit train de tiges (20) est appliquée contre la paroi du puits;
 - dans lequel ledit train de tiges (20) peut être manipulé et orienté de telle sorte que ledit transducteur (34) est tourné vers la paroi (24) du puits dans la position radiale dans laquelle la paroi latérale dudit train de tiges (20) est appliquée contre la paroi du puits, et dans lequel ledit ordinateur / dispositif de commande (36) active ledit transducteur (34) pour qu'il émette une impulsion acoustique et détecte une impulsion acoustique d'écho associée pour mesurer ladite valeur de temps de transit aller et retour minimale.
11. Dispositif MWD selon la revendication 10, dans lequel ledit dispositif de vérification comprend des magnétomètres et des accéléromètres.
12. Dispositif MWD selon la revendication 10 ou 11, dans lequel ledit second élément tubulaire est une masse-tige MWD (26).
13. Procédé MWD pour mesurer une distance d'écartement dans un puits de forage (22), le puits (22)

comportant une paroi (24), selon lequel la mesure est exécutée en présence d'un fluide forage (28) situé dans le puits (22), ledit procédé consistant à :

prendre un train de tiges (20) servant à forer le puits (22), ledit train de tiges (20) étant immergé dans le fluide de forage (28);
 prendre un premier élément tubulaire (30) prévu sur ledit train de tiges (20), ledit élément tubulaire (30) possédant un rayon R2;
 prendre un second élément tubulaire (26) monté avec ledit premier élément tubulaire le long dudit train de tiges (20), ledit second élément tubulaire possédant un rayon R1, R1 étant inférieur à R2;
 prendre un transducteur acoustique (34) monté sur ledit second élément tubulaire dans une position proche dudit élément tubulaire (30) de sorte que ledit transducteur est séparé de la paroi (24) du puits approximativement par la différence radiale R2-R1 lorsque les parois latérales du train de tiges (20) et dudit premier élément tubulaire (30) sont appliquées contre la paroi (24) du puits et lorsque ledit second élément tubulaire (26) est orienté de telle sorte que ledit transducteur (34) est tourné vers la paroi (24) du puits, ledit transducteur (34) comprenant des moyens pour émettre, recevoir et détecter des impulsions acoustiques;
 prévoir un ordinateur / dispositif de commande (36) couplé électriquement, audit transducteur (34) pour activer ledit transducteur (34) pour qu'il émette une impulsion acoustique et détecte le moment où ledit transducteur (34) reçoit une impulsion acoustique d'écho, pour mesurer le temps de transit aller et retour entre chaque impulsion émise produite par ledit transducteur et l'impulsion acoustique d'écho qui lui est associée, pour analyser une pluralité de valeurs de temps de transit aller et retour afin de déterminer une valeur de temps de transit aller et retour minimale correspondant au fait que ledit transducteur (34) est séparé de la paroi (24) du puits par la différence radiale R2-R1, pour calculer la vitesse du son (V) dans le fluide de forage en tant que double de la différence radiale R2-R1 divisée par ladite valeur de temps de transit aller-retour minimale, et pour calculer une distance d'écartement dudit transducteur (34) par multiplication de ladite vitesse du son (V) dans le fluide de forage par la moitié de la valeur desdits temps de transit aller et retour.

14. Procédé selon la revendication 13, dans lequel ledit second élément tubulaire est une masse-tige (26).

15. Procédé selon la revendication 13 ou 14, dans

lequel ledit premier élément tubulaire (30) comprend un tubage à renflement.

16. Procédé selon la revendication 13 ou 14, dans lequel ledit premier élément tubulaire comprend une lame de stabilisation.

17. Procédé selon l'une quelconque des revendications 13-16, dans lequel ledit ordinateur/dispositif de commande (36) est actionné par :

- (a) activation d'un signal impulsionnel pour déclencher ledit transducteur (34) pour qu'il émette une impulsion acoustique et reçoive un signal d'écho indiquant que ledit transducteur a détecté une impulsion acoustique d'écho;
- (b) prévoir un circuit de commande couplé audit ordinateur (70) et audit transducteur (34), et dans lequel ledit dispositif de commande :

- (1) active ledit transducteur (34) lors de la réception dudit signal impulsionnel de la part dudit ordinateur (70);
- (2) reçoit et amplifie des signaux produits par ledit transducteur (34) en réponse à la réception de ladite impulsion acoustique d'écho; et
- (3) détecte lesdits signaux amplifiés et délivre, en réponse, ledit signal d'écho audit ordinateur (70).

18. Procédé selon l'une quelconque des revendications 13 à 17, dans lequel ledit ordinateur / dispositif de commande (36) analyse ladite pluralité des valeurs de temps de transit aller et retour pour déterminer si une valeur de temps de transit aller et retour minimale périodique et répétée est mesurée.

19. Procédé selon l'une quelconque des revendications 13 à 18, selon lequel une pluralité de valeurs de temps de transit aller et retour pour un intervalle de temps prédéterminé écoulé sont acquises et mémorisées en fonction de valeurs en temps réel dans un enregistrement, une pluralité desdits enregistrements sont acquis et mémorisés, lesdits enregistrements sont analysés pour déterminer si une valeur de temps de transit aller et retour minimale périodique est apparue et si ladite valeur de temps de transit aller et retour minimale a été répétée dans ladite pluralité d'enregistrements.

20. Procédé selon l'une quelconque des revendications 13 à 17, selon lequel ledit ordinateur/dispositif de commande (70) divise la gamme totale prédéterminée de valeurs de temps de transit aller et retour attendues en une pluralité de crêneaux contigus, chacun desdits crêneaux représentant une partie de ladite gamme totale de valeurs de temps de

- transit aller et retour attendues, et dans lequel ledit ordinateur mesure chaque valeur de temps de transit aller et retour et incrémente un créneau correspondant.
21. Procédé selon la revendication 20, selon lequel ledit ordinateur / dispositif de commande (70) reçoit une pluralité de valeurs de temps de transit aller et retour et incrémente lesdits créneaux correspondants; et détermine ladite valeur de temps de transit aller et retour minimale à partir d'un créneau possédant la valeur de comptage maximale correspondant à la valeur de temps de transit aller et retour minimale.
22. Procédé selon la revendication 13, consistant en outre à
- prendre un dispositif pour manipuler et orienter ledit train de tiges (20);
- prendre un dispositif pour vérifier que la paroi latérale dudit train de tiges (20) est appliquée contre la paroi (24) du puits et que le train de tiges (20) est orienté de telle sorte que ledit transducteur (34) est tourné vers la paroi (24) du puits, dans la position radiale dans laquelle la paroi latérale dudit train de tiges (20) est appliquée contre la paroi du puits;
- selon lequel ledit train de tiges (20) est manipulé et orienté de telle sorte que ledit transducteur (34) est dirigé vers la paroi (24) du puits dans la position radiale dans laquelle la paroi latérale dudit train de tiges (20) est appliquée contre la paroi du puits, et dans lequel ledit ordinateur / dispositif de commande (36) active ledit transducteur (34) pour qu'il émette une impulsion acoustique et détecte une impulsion acoustique d'écho associée pour mesurer ladite valeur de temps de transit aller et retour minimale.
23. Procédé MWD selon la revendication 22, selon lequel ledit dispositif de vérification mesure des vecteurs magnétiques et des vecteurs de gravité.
24. Procédé MWD selon la revendication 22 ou 23, selon lequel ledit second élément tubulaire est une massetige MWD (26) située dans le train de tiges.
25. Procédé MWD selon la revendication 23, selon lequel le procédé de mesure de la vitesse du son dans le fluide de forage à l'intérieur d'un puits comprend les étapes consistant à :
- prévoir des moyens tonnant émetteur et récepteur acoustiques dans un train de tiges dans le puits;
- mesurer un temps de transit aller et retour

nécessaire à un signal pour la transmission d'un signal depuis les moyens formant émetteur et récepteur à la paroi du puits et retour;

disposer une partie du train de tiges pour qu'elle s'étende radialement sur une distance connue au-delà des moyens formant émetteur et récepteur de telle sorte que, lorsque cette partie vient en contact avec la paroi du puits, les moyens formant émetteur et récepteur sont situés approximativement à ladite distance connue de la paroi du puits; et

calculer la vitesse du son dans le fluide de forage par division de ladite distance connue par la moitié d'un temps de transit aller et retour déterminé comme ayant été obtenu lorsque ladite partie du train de tiges est en contact avec la paroi et lesdits moyens formant émetteur et récepteur sont tournés vers la paroi.

26. Procédé selon la revendication 25, selon lequel on fait tourner un train de tiges, on détermine une pluralité de temps de transit aller et retour, et on détermine une valeur minimale desdits temps de transit aller et retour comme étant un temps de transit aller et retour obtenu lorsque ladite partie du train de tiges est en contact avec la paroi du puits et que les moyens formant émetteur et récepteur sont tournés vers la paroi du puits.
27. Procédé selon la revendication 25, selon lequel la détermination du fait que la partie du train de tiges est en contact avec la paroi du puits et que les moyens formant émetteur et récepteur sont tournés vers la paroi, est exécutée en utilisant des capteurs montés sur le train de tiges.
28. Dispositif MWD selon la revendication 1, dans lequel le dispositif servant à mesurer la vitesse du son dans le fluide de forage dans un puits comprend des moyens formant émetteur et récepteur acoustique, montés sur le train de tiges;

des moyens pour déterminer un temps de transit aller et retour nécessaire au signal pour se déplacer depuis les moyens formant émetteur et récepteur en direction de la paroi du puits et retour;

une partie du train de tiges qui s'étend radialement sur une distance connue au-delà des moyens formant émetteur et récepteur de sorte que, lorsque cette partie vient en contact avec la paroi du puits, les moyens formant émetteur et récepteur sont séparés de la paroi du puits par une distance égale approximativement à la distance connue; et

des moyens pour calculer la vitesse du son du fluide de forage en divisant ladite distance connue par un temps de transit aller et retour

déterminé comme ayant été obtenu lorsque ladite partie du train de tiges est en contact avec la paroi du puits et que les moyens formant émetteur et récepteur sont tournés vers la paroi.

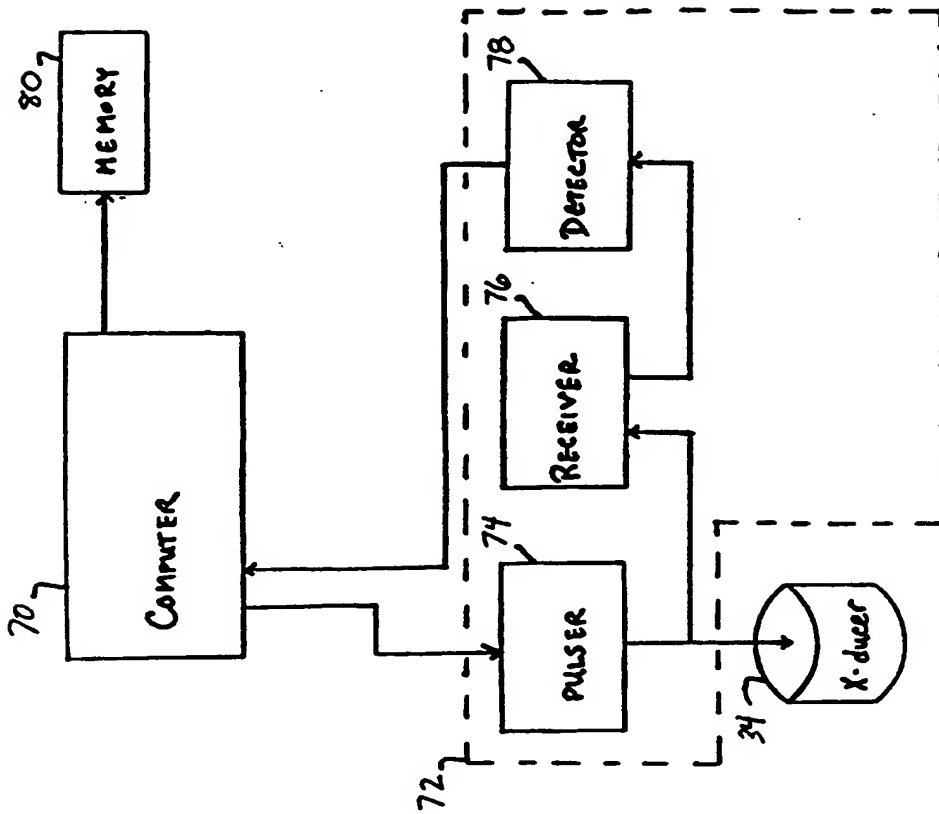


FIG. 2

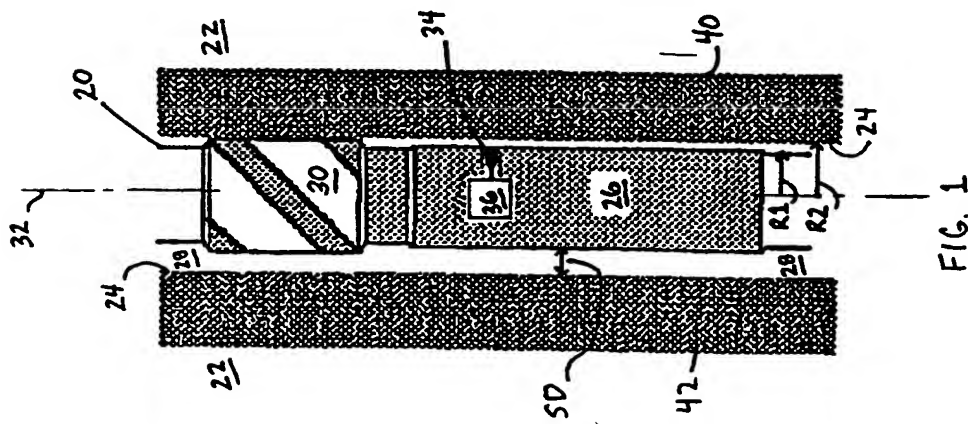
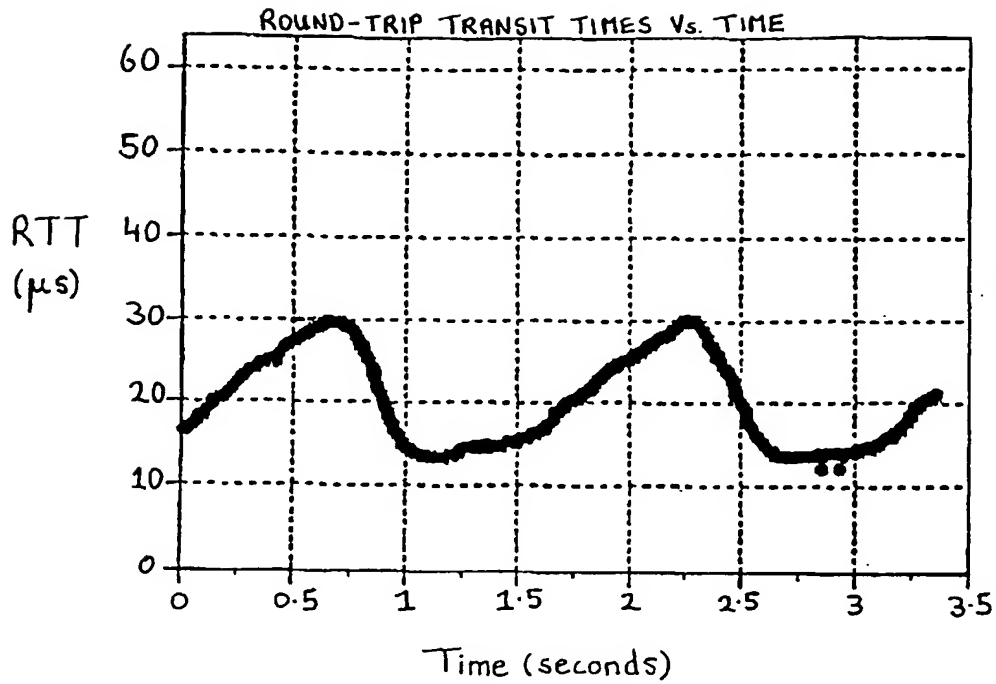
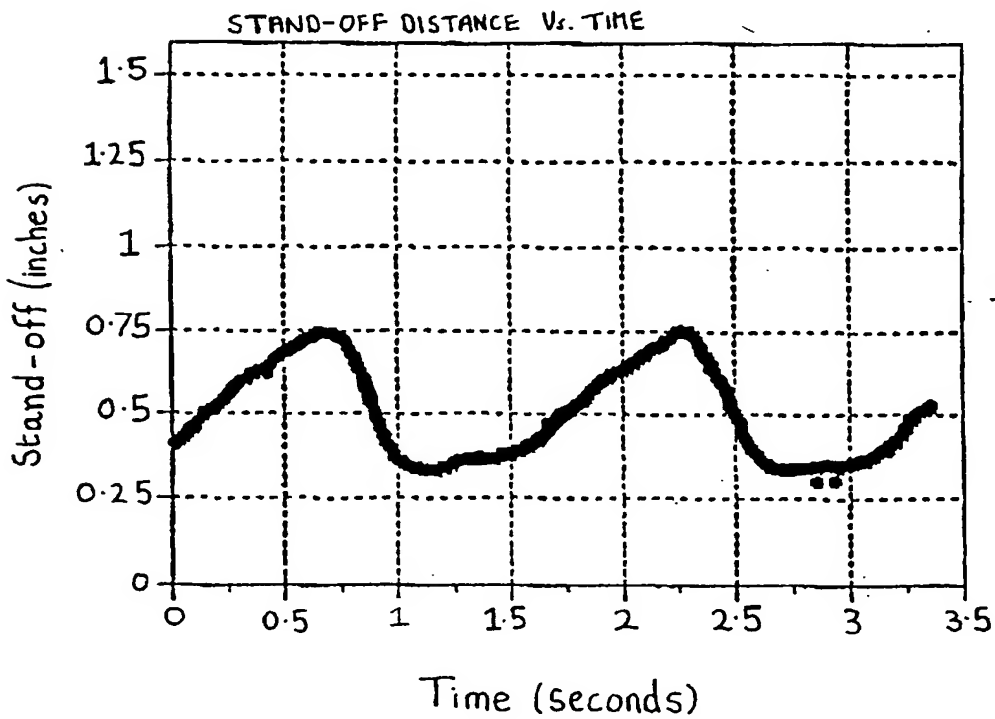


FIG. 1

Fig. 3aFig. 3b

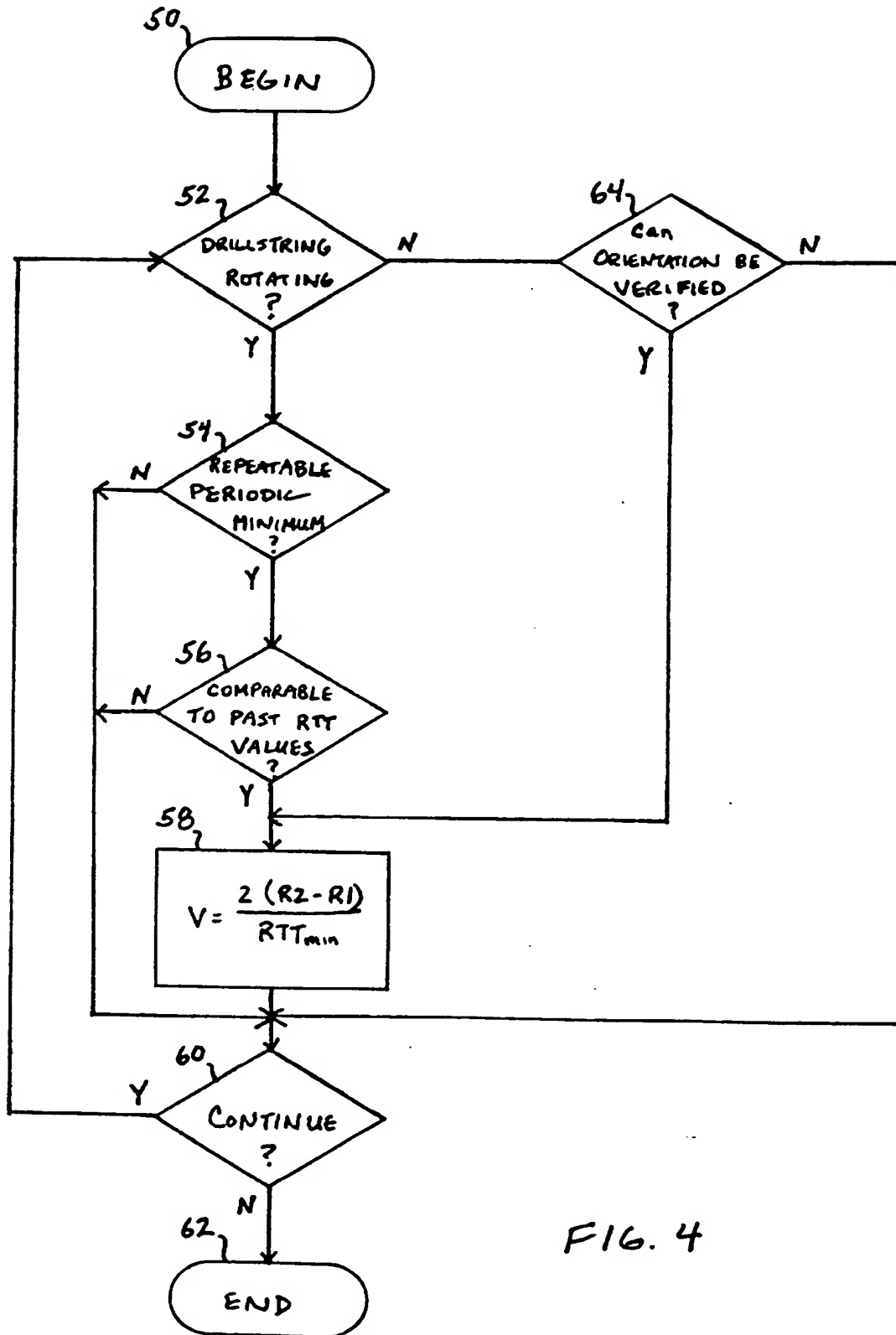


FIG. 4

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